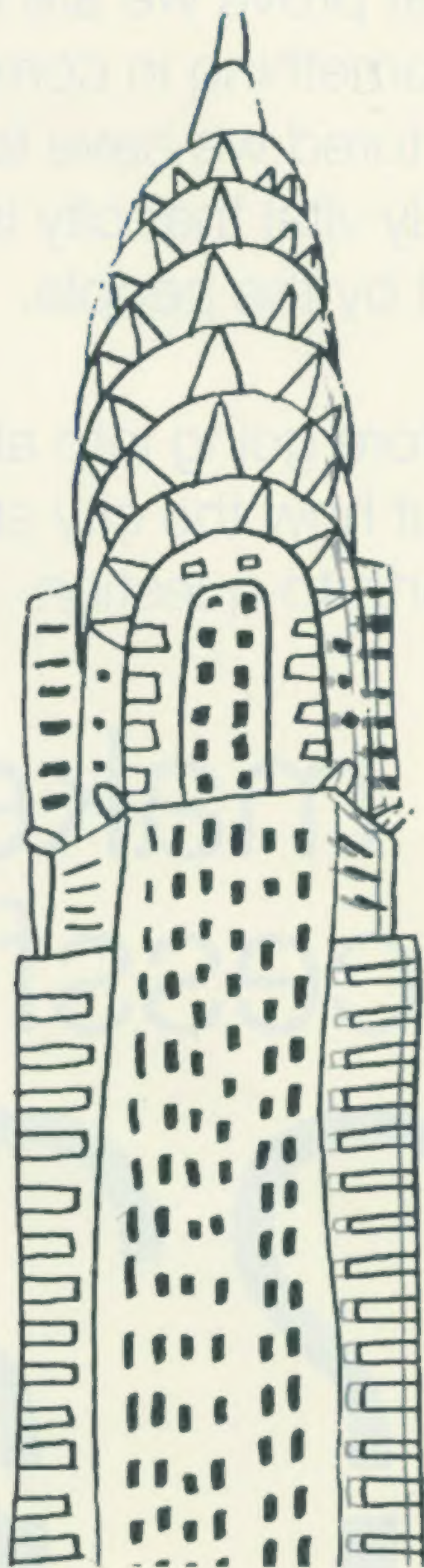# THE CITY FORUM: NEW YORK

Urban planning is a highly complex living organism form by human. Its the combination of all knowledge including psychology, sociology, anthropology and to name a few. Public space is the only thing that prove we are living in the same realm, to have something in common. It's a mutually agreed structured we have to lived by. Therefore it is extremely vital that city is build for the people and build by the people.

...to start off, before going into all the highly complex details about how the city should be constructed, it is worth to question...

What makes a successful city

????
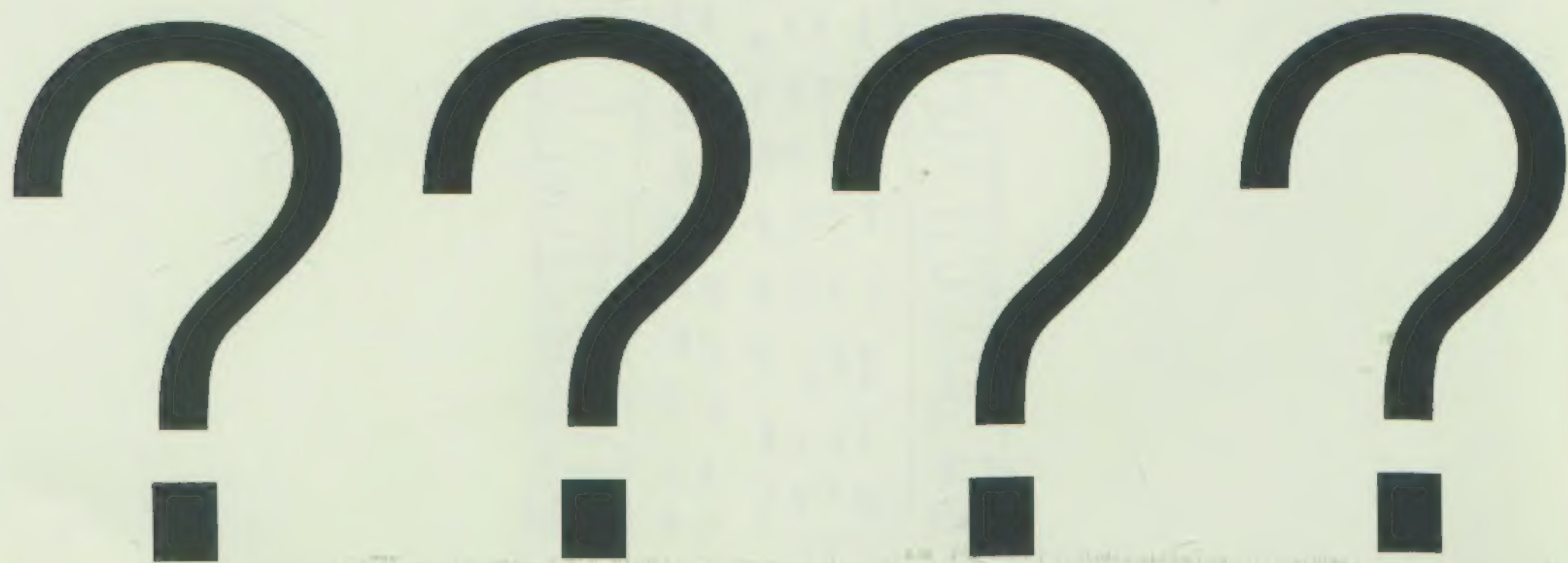
Draw, write, sketch, describe any traits that makes a city successful in your opinion ???

Happy City

by Charles Montgomery

Montgomery emphasizes that a successful city prioritizes...

HAPPINESS   WELL-BEING

and through thoughtful urban design and community agreement not just efficiency and economic growth

Key Principles:

1. Promote Social Connection
2. Walkability and Active Transportation
3. Mixed-Used Neighborhood
4. Greenspaces and Nature
5. Equity and Inclusion
6. Reducing Car Dependancy
7. Human Centered Design
8. Happiness Metric

Montgomery placed human connection, accesibility and meaningful engagement with the environment at the central of successful city.

Things you enjoyed about New York City?

Things that you wish exist in New York City?

The Death And Life Of Great American Cities

by Jane Jacobs

Despite their differences approach, both Jacobs and Montgomery share a vision for cities that prioritize people over cars, vibrant public spaces, and social connection. Both reject large-scale, top-down urban planning that overlooks the nuances of daily urban life.

In The Death and Life of Great American Cities (1961), Jane Jacobs redefined urban planning and introduced a revolutionary perspective on what makes a successful city. Jacobs argued that cities thrive when they prioritize the needs and experiences of people over abstract planning theories or top-down urban renewal projects. Her vision centers on the vibrancy, diversity, and human-scale design of neighborhoods.

Diversity of Uses

Mixed-Use Development: Cities should have a mix of residential, commercial, industrial, and recreational spaces. This diversity keeps neighborhoods active throughout the day and night, reducing crime and fostering vibrant street life. A mix of uses ensures "eyes on the street" (Jacobs' term for natural surveillance) and creates a sense of safety and liveliness.


Density and Concentration of People

Jane Jacobs believes that cities need people to be packed together to be lively and successful. She says that having lots of people in a small area helps create different kinds of businesses and activities, and it makes the neighborhood feel more alive. Dense areas have a constant flow of people, which encourages people to talk to each other, do business, and make the streets come alive.

People often think that density means overcrowding and chaos, but Jacobs says that's not true. When density is paired with good design, it can actually make communities stronger and safer. Dense neighborhoods encourage people to hang out in public places, which helps build community bonds and makes people feel safer. Jacobs also says that density can boost the local economy by encouraging businesses and innovation.

To make the most of density, Jacobs says that cities need to be designed well. This means having short blocks, walkable streets, and mixed-use development. It also means having access to green spaces. These things make sure that density doesn't feel too overwhelming, but instead creates opportunities for comfort, convenience, and sustainability. Well-designed dense neighborhoods can reduce car traffic, preserve natural areas, and lower the impact on the environment.

In the end, Jacobs sees density as a key to making cities successful. When planned well, it can create diverse neighborhoods, safe communities, thriving economies, and environmentally friendly cities.

Short Blocks
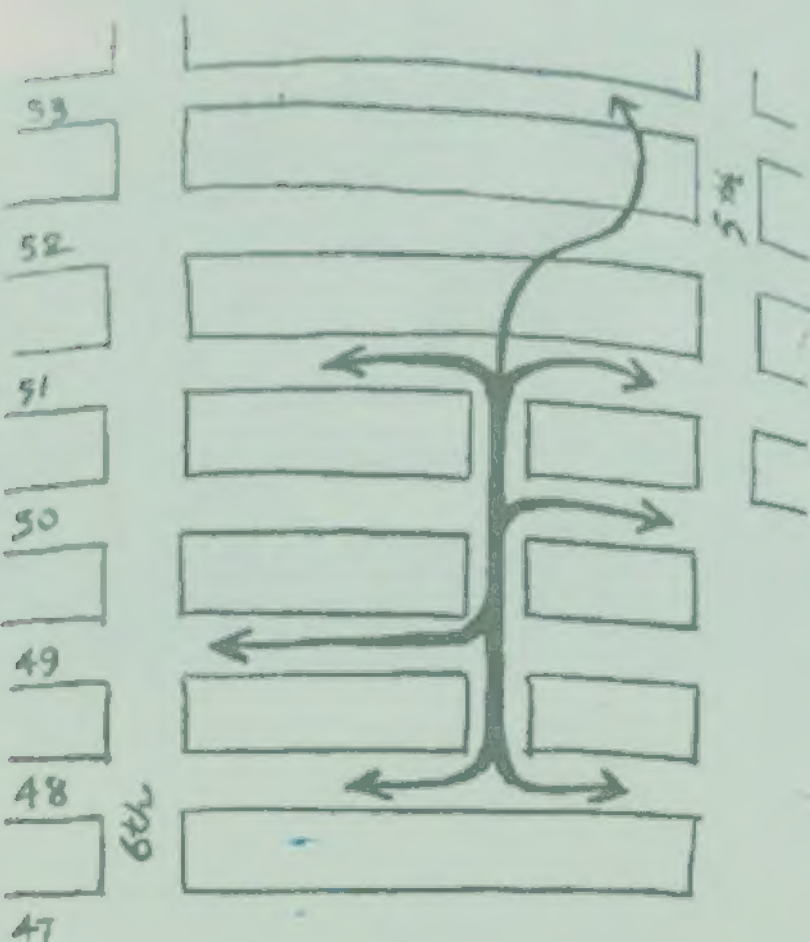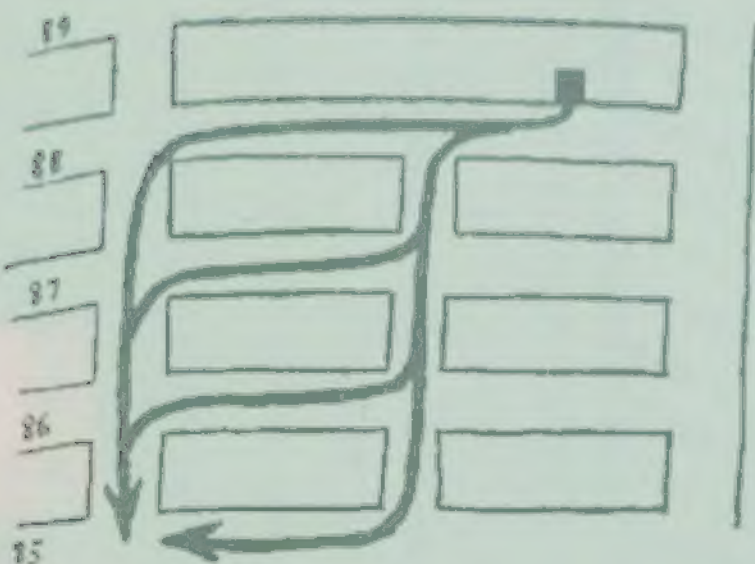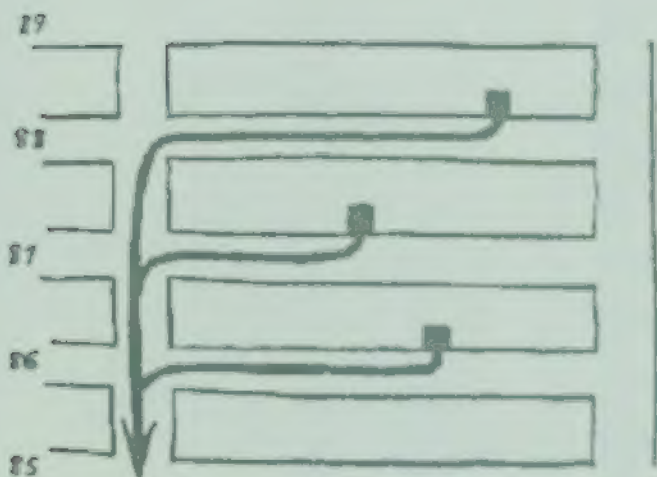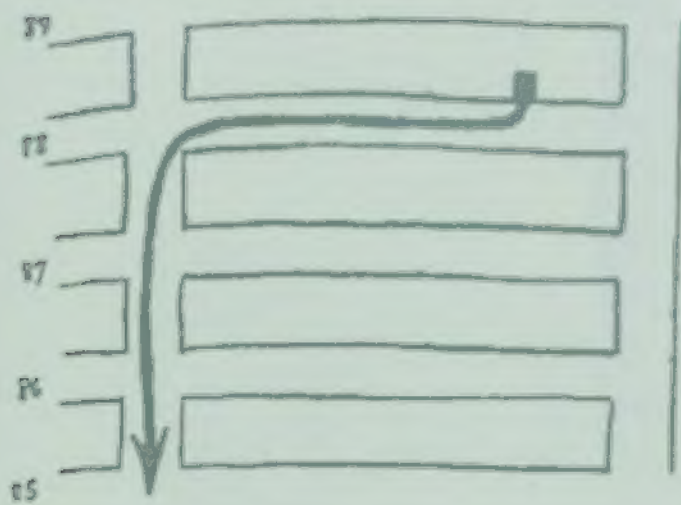
Jane Jacobs underscores the critical role of short blocks in creating vibrant, diverse, and economically successful urban neighborhoods. She argues that short blocks, with their frequent intersections, encourage connectivity and movement, enabling people to choose multiple routes to their destinations. This fosters exploration, increases foot traffic, and supports local businesses, creating a lively, interactive urban environment.

By contrast, long blocks are described as barriers to urban vibrancy. They isolate neighborhoods, discourage walking, and limit the natural mixing of people and activities that give cities their dynamic character. Long blocks reduce opportunities for interaction and exploration, making streets feel monotonous and less engaging.

Short blocks also promote economic and social benefits. They enhance the visibility of storefronts and local businesses, leading to increased commerce, and contribute to the "street ballet" Jacobs celebrates—an organic mix of diverse activities and people that creates a sense of safety, vibrancy, and community. Moreover, they provide variety in the urban experience, breaking up monotony and making cities more interesting and walkable.

In essence, Jacobs presents short blocks as a foundational design element for healthy, thriving cities. They encourage diversity, connectivity, and exploration, which are key to sustaining dynamic urban life.
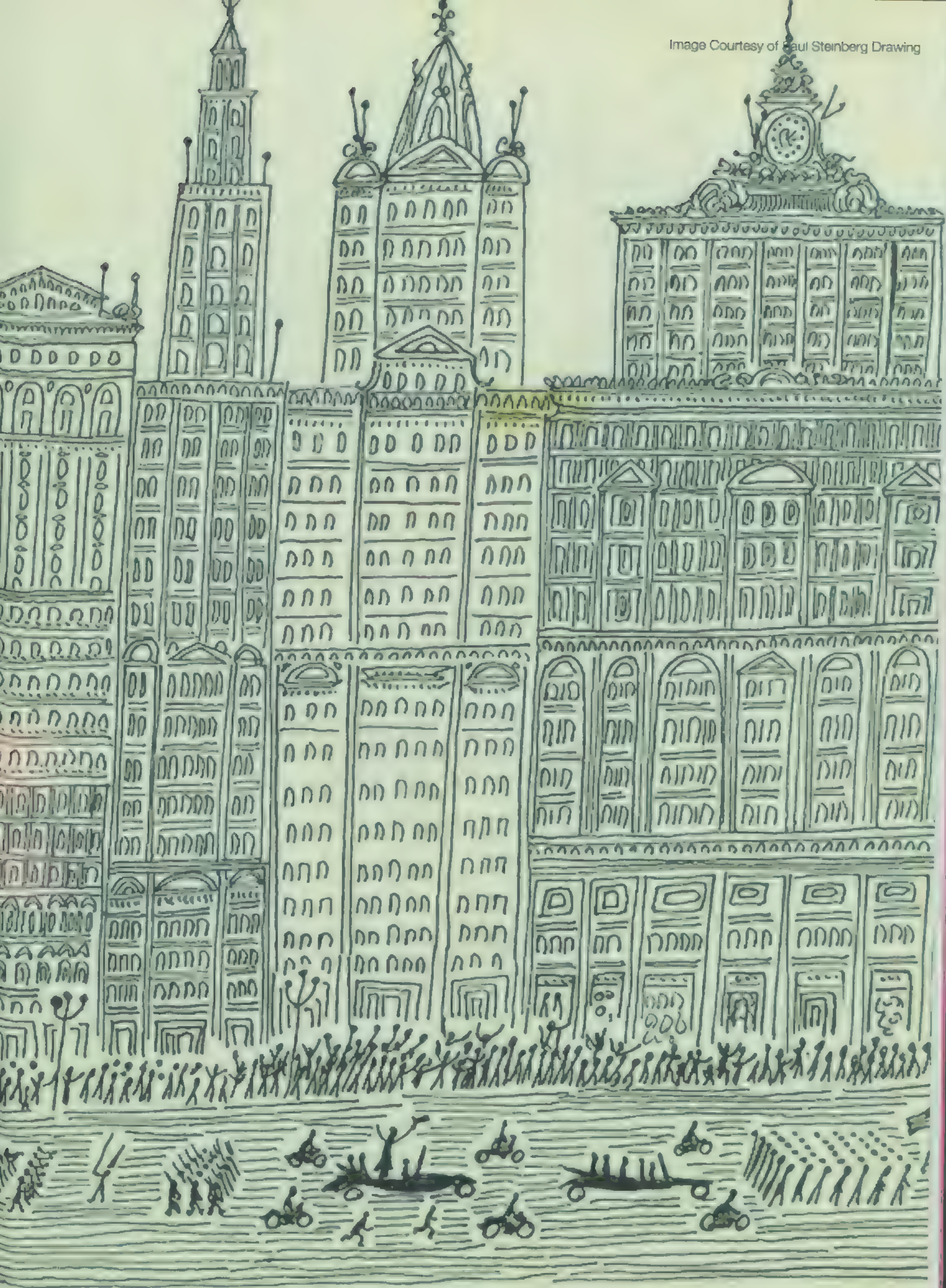
In contrast...
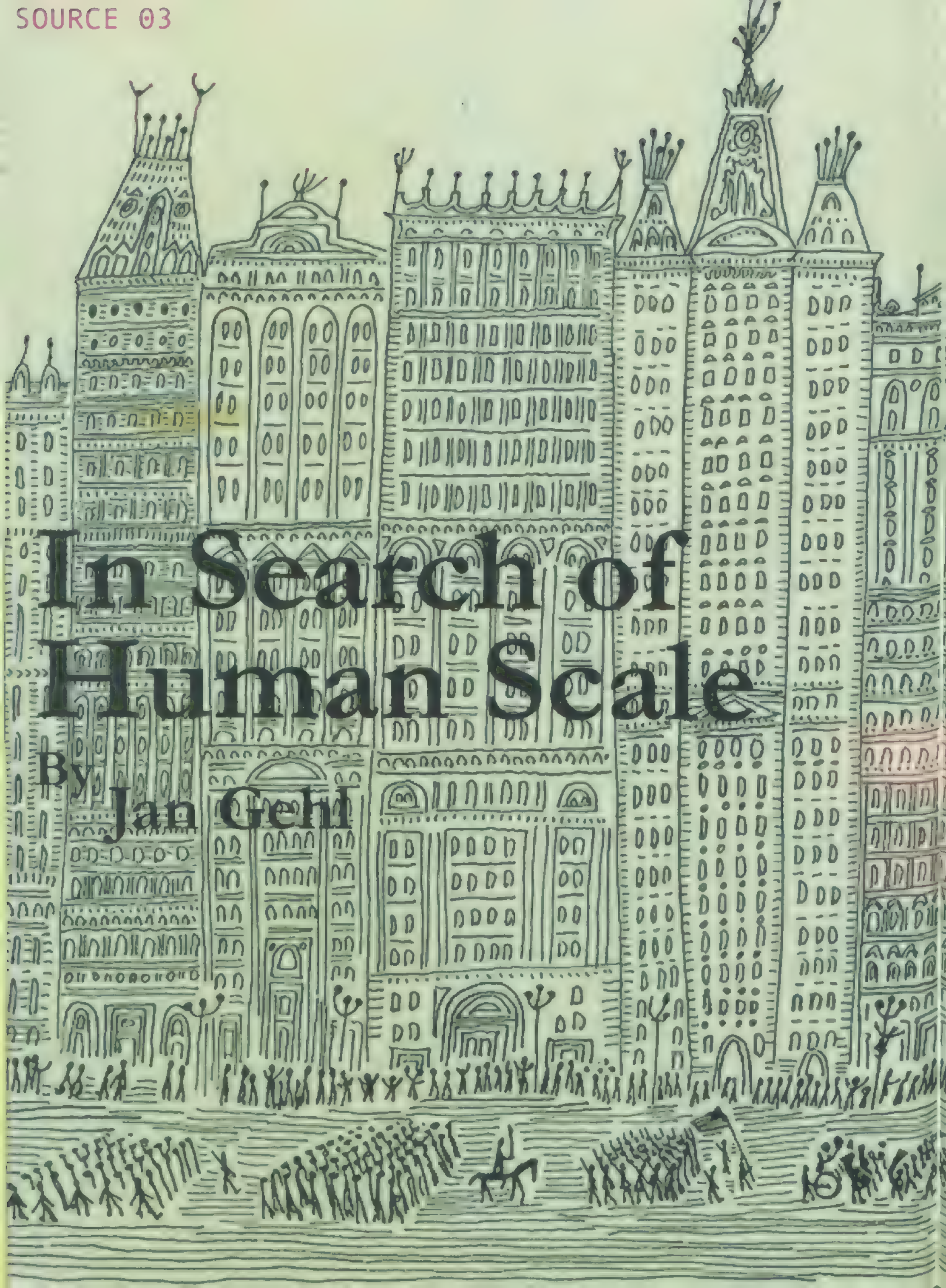
In Search of Human Scale

By Jan Gehl

Image Courtesy of Saul Steinberg Drawing

Ideas of designing the city changed radically around the 1950s when modernist rigidity was trying to find a new way to operate the cities. They believed in free-standing buildings, they believed that streets and squares were bad, in turn, what was considered good was parks and grass. Therefore, a total new way of designing a city was formed and people and architects were extremely excited.
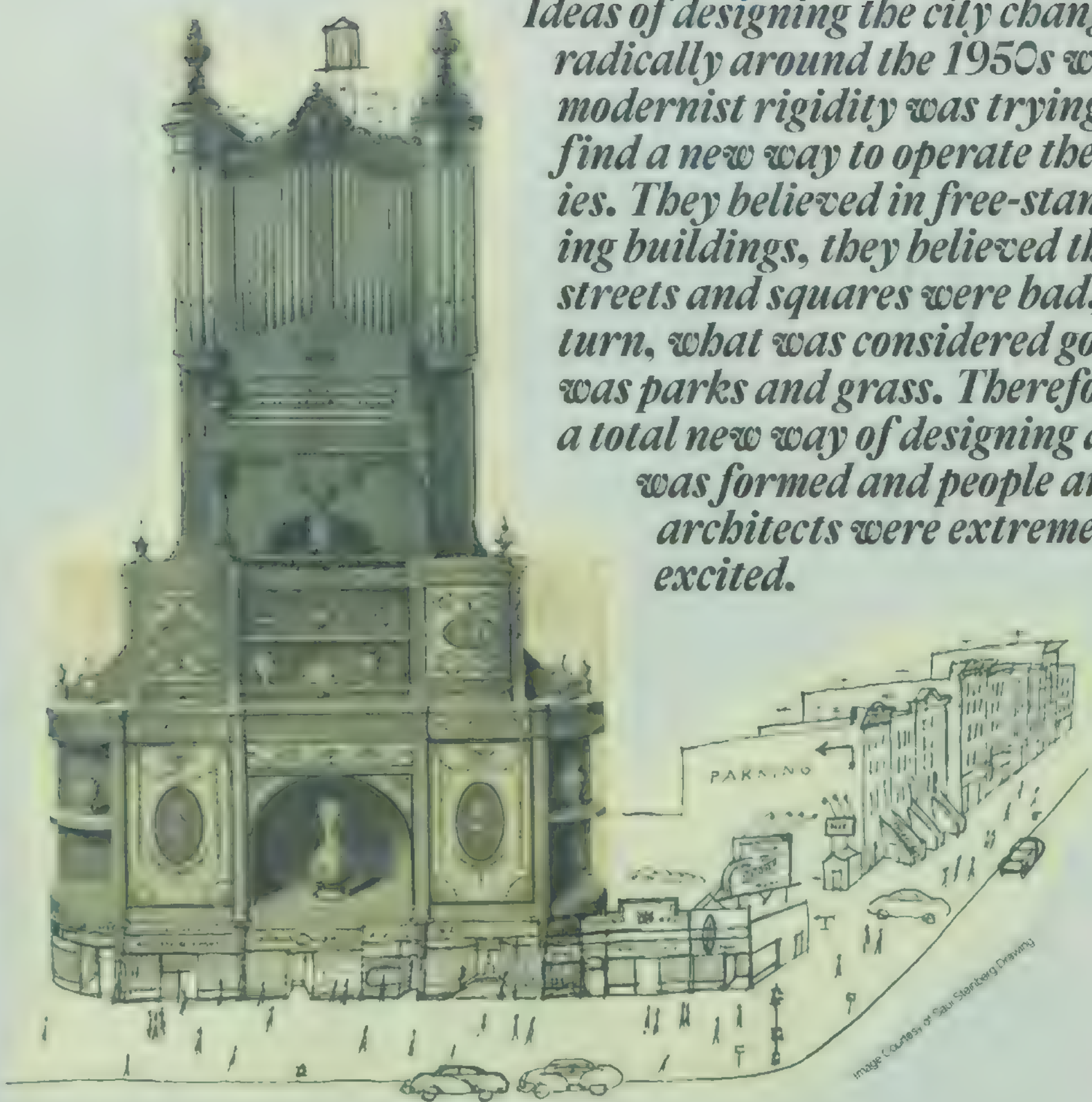
Jan Gehl's critique of modernist urban planning centers around its neglect of the human scale, a fundamental concept in creating livable and engaging cities. He argues that modernist designs prioritize efficiency, vehicles, and monumental structures, ignoring how people experience their surroundings at eye level and walking speed. This approach often results in environments that feel alienating and disconnected, with wide roads, towering buildings, and isolated spaces that fail to cater to human interaction and comfort.

The human scale, as Gehl defines it, focuses on designing cities that align with the natural ways people move, perceive, and interact. Streets, public spaces, and buildings should be proportioned to make walking and cycling enjoyable while fostering a sense of safety and connection. Modernist planning, by contrast, often sacrifices this scale in favor of large-scale developments that prioritize cars over pedestrians, leading to fragmented neighborhoods and lifeless urban areas.

Gehl emphasizes that successful urban design must prioritize the human experience, creating spaces that encourage social interaction, community engagement, and daily use. Vibrant, human-scaled environments are inviting and foster a sense of belonging, as opposed to the sterile, disconnected spaces typical of modernist cities. For Gehl, restoring the human scale to urban planning is essential for making cities more livable, dynamic, and inclusive.

Prioritize Human Scale

Modernist

BRASILIA SYNDROME

The Brasília Syndrome refers to a phenomenon where urban planning prioritizes grand, modernist designs and large-scale infrastructure at the expense of human-scale living, functionality, and community engagement. The term is often used critically to describe urban environments that look impressive from an aerial or theoretical perspective but fail to serve the needs and daily experiences of the people who live there.

The concept derives from the design of Brasília, Brazil's capital city, which was planned in the 1950s by modernist architect Oscar Niemeyer and urban planner Lúcio Costa. Brasília was conceived as a utopian city designed to showcase modernist ideals, including:

Monumental architecture: Grand government buildings and expansive plazas. Zoning segregation: Residential, commercial, and administrative functions were separated into distinct areas. Car-centric design: A layout that heavily prioritized highways and long distances, making walking and biking impractical.

While Brasília's design is celebrated for its architectural beauty and innovation, it has been criticized for its inhuman scale and lack of livability. Many of its features, such as vast, empty spaces and a focus on car travel, have created an environment that feels impersonal and disconnected from the needs of its residents.

"When I was a student, Brasília was considered the ideal city. It was fantastic from a plane, designed in the shape of a big eagle, with the head being the parliament building. It was beautiful! Especially if you travel in helicopter you can see the government buildings designed by Niemeyer, you can see huge blocks. In helicopter it's great, but down below where the people live, Brasília is shit.

Not everybody could afford to ride in helicopter in order to be able enjoy Brasília. When I was there, I had a broken leg and it wasn't very friendly. There were no trees, no shade, it wasn't very nice."
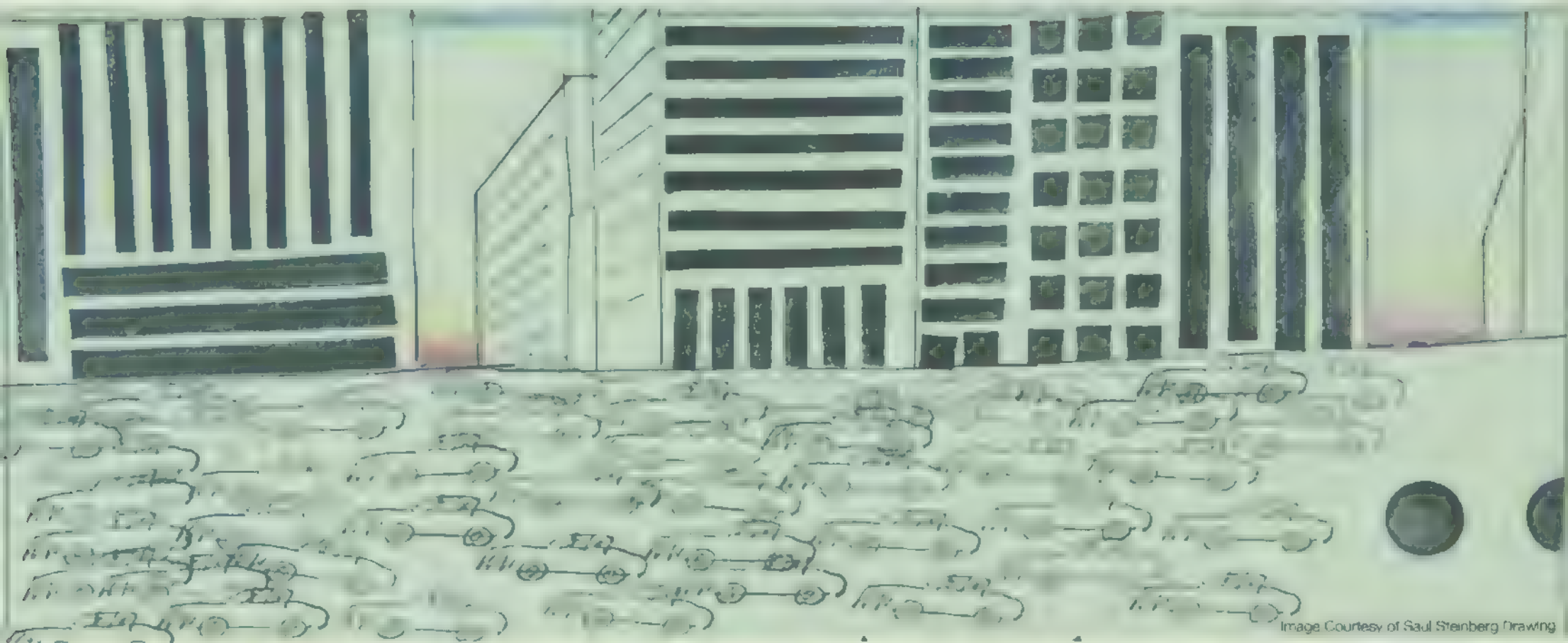
- Jan Gehl

CAR INVASION

Jan Gehl has been a vocal critic of the car invasion in cities, which refers to the dominance of automobiles in urban planning and design, often at the expense of pedestrians, cyclists, and public life. Gehl argues that the prioritization of cars has led to fragmented neighborhoods, reduced quality of life, and cities that are unsafe and uninviting for human-scale activities.

1 The Problem of Car-Centric Planning

Loss of Public Space
Streets and squares are taken over by cars, leaving little room for pedestrians and cyclists.

Isolation and fragmentation
Wide roads and highways divide communities, making it difficult for people to connect and interact

Pollution and Noise
Increased car usage contributes to air pollution and noise, adversely affecting health and well-being.

Safety Concerns
High traffic speeds and car dominance make streets unsafe for pedestrians and cyclists

Decline in Social Interaction
Car-centric environments discourage walking and biking, reducing the opportunities for spontaneous social encounters that create vibrant public life.

2 Cars and the Death of Public Life

Gehl argues that Cities designed for cars often become lifeless and unwelcoming for people. Wide roads, large parking lots, and traffic congestion make urban spaces feel impersonal and alienating. By contrast, pedestrian-friendly Cities foster interaction, safety, and a sense of community

3 Advocacy for Human-Centered Cities

Gehl advocates for urban designs that prioritize people over vehicle
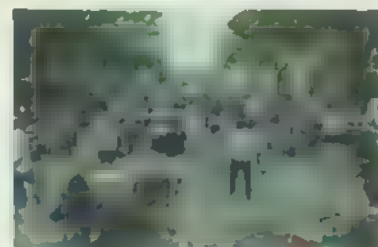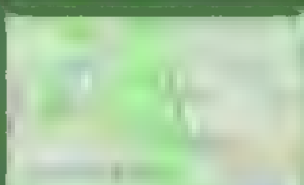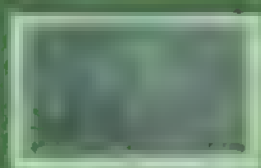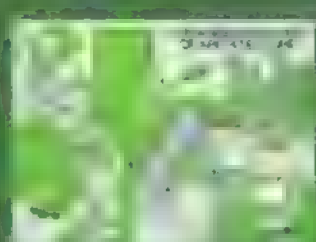
Open Street

Mixed used development

Public Transport Infrastructure

Bike Friendly Design

In addition to Jan Gehl, this article by Lia Schinftto also investigate the car shaped our shared social geographies

Imagine you're the mastermind behind redesigning Manhattan.
How would you draw up the city's blueprint? Where would you
put the roads, where would you put the parks, and where
would you put the buildings? How would you make sure the city's
zoning is fair and balanced? Keep in mind all the principles we
discussed of how successful cities are accomplished.

Designed by:
Date:
Notes:

Designed by:
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Those previously mentioned are some of the ingredients that create a successful city. Likye I mentioned, a city is a living organism. We are all in pursuit of a better city. I believe that by all the knowledge from different scholars together with citizen understanding and participation, we can continuously work towards a better city.

"... Please look closely at real cities, while you are looking, you might as well also listen, linger, and think about what you see."

- Jane Jacobs

Once we begin observing city life and its interaction with physical surrounding, even the most ordinary street corner can provide interesting knowledge about the interplay of city life and form - anywhere in the world. We can systematize our observations by asking basic question like who, what and where.

How is a bench used?

Mark Von Vodtke
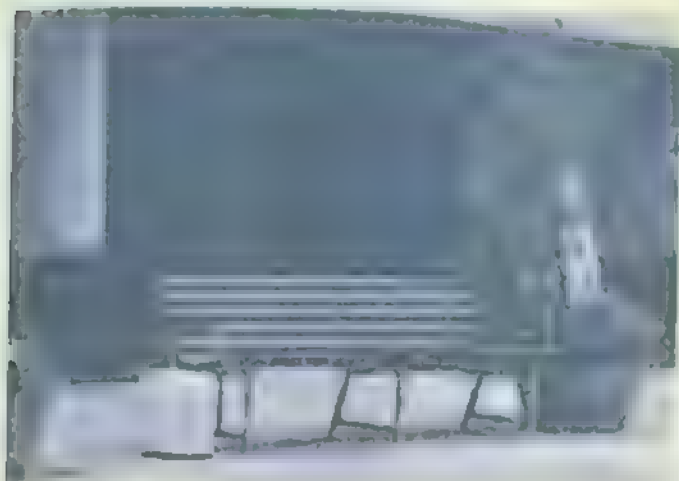
There's a bench.

A+B: "...well, let's sit..."

A+B: "... so I can puff on my pipe" (The man in the background is still waiting.)

C: "Ah, an empty seat on the end. I'll grab that."

A+B: "Well, time to move on."

C: "This is a good place to sit."

C: "Here come two apprentices with paint all over their pants. I think I've been here long enough."

D+E: "Wow, did you get a look at her?"

There's an empty bench.

F: "Ah, an empty bench. I wonder if there are any red ones left?"

G: "This is a nice place. I'll sit at the opposite end. What on Earth is that white stuff? Fresh paint! ... well, I'm not going to sit there."

F: "So he didn't really want to sit down. I guess I'm stuck with my own company." (The baby is still waiting patiently in his stroller.)

7

The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces

by William H. Whyte

William H. Whyte explores how people use and interact within urban public spaces, providing ground-breaking insights into what makes these spaces vibrant and successful. Based on detailed observational studies, Whyte identifies the key elements that encourage social interaction, foster community engagement, and enhance the livability of cities.

Whyte emphasizes that well-designed public spaces are essential for social life. Successful urban spaces are those that attract people and facilitate spontaneous interaction. Features such as seating, greenery, accessibility, and proximity to amenities like food vendors are vital. Whyte highlights the importance of moveable seating, allowing people to configure their environment to suit their needs, which fosters a sense of ownership and comfort.

A recurring theme in the book is the importance of scale and accessibility. Whyte argues that small, human-scaled spaces are more inviting and foster greater social activity than large, monumental plazas. These spaces should be easy to reach, visible, and seamlessly integrated into the city's fabric, encouraging people to linger and connect.

Whyte also critiques urban planning practices that neglect human behavior. He highlights common mistakes, such as overdesigning or creating sterile spaces devoid of functional elements, which result in underutilized areas. Instead, he advocates for a bottom-up approach, observing how people naturally use spaces and designing around those patterns.

Ultimately, The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces is a call to create public spaces that prioritize human needs. By understanding and accommodating the ways people interact with their surroundings, cities can foster vibrant, engaging, and inclusive environments that enrich urban life.
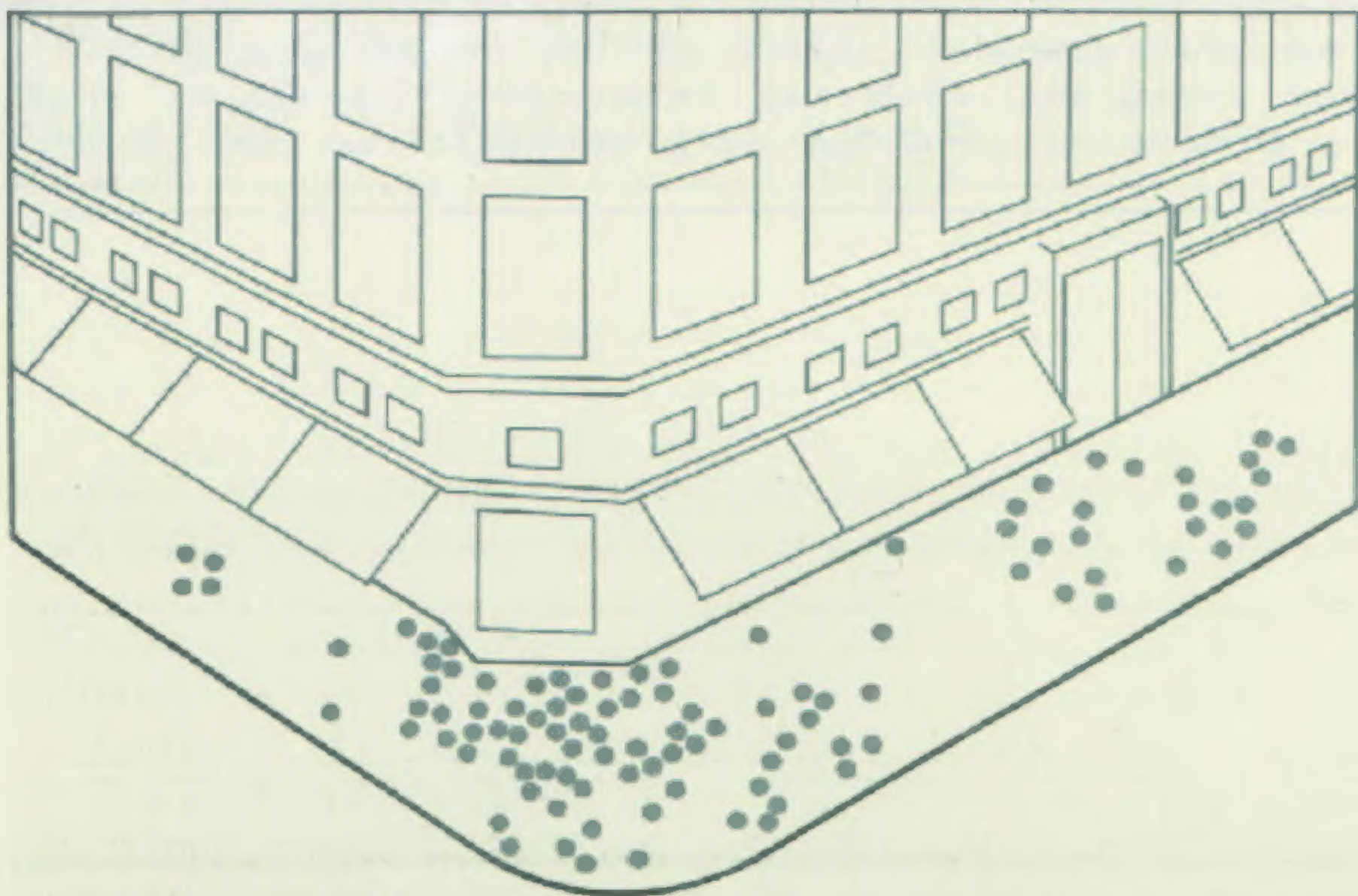
Location of street conversations lasting two minutes or more at Saks Fifth Avenue and Fiftieth Street. Cumulative for five days in June. Note main concentration at corner, secondary one outside entrance.
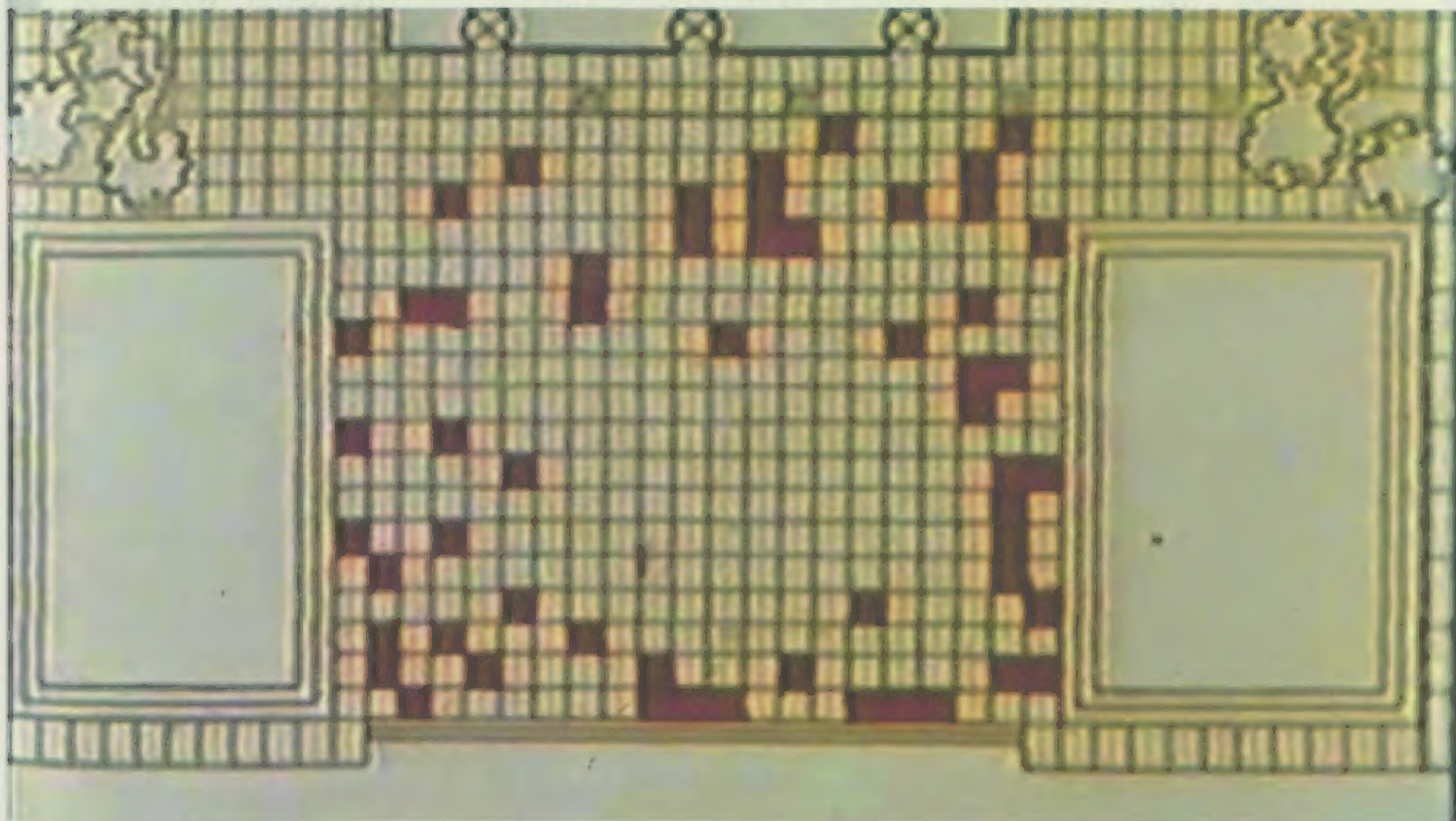
A heat map depicting the locations of individuals who frequently halt or stand in front of the Seagram Building in New York City.

From your memories, think of the route you take home every day; what are some of the features which you believe are **good** and beneficial to the Public?

From your memories, think of the route you take
home every day; what are some of the features which
you believe are **bad** and not used by the Public?

_____

by Win Bulbon